

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

news release

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## CRITICAL HABITAT DETERMINED FOR TWO ENDANGERED CALIFORNIA PLANTS

Critical habitat has been determined for two endangered California plants, the Contra Costa wallflower and the Antioch Dunes evening-primrose, by the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

This is the first time that critical habitat has been designated for plants. The Endangered Species Act of 1973 allows the Department of the Interior to designate appropriate habitat as critical to the survival of any species listed as endangered or threatened.

The final rulemaking, published in the August 31, 1978, Federal Register, includes about 60 acres of the Antioch Dunes just east of Antioch, Contra Costa County, California. This area supports the only known wild populations of the wallflower (Erysimum capitatum var. angustatum) and the evening-primrose (Oenothera deltoides ssp. howellii). Within the Antioch Dunes area are several man-made developments such as a police rifle range, vineyards, and mines; however, the critical habitat designation does not apply to these because they are not necessary to the survival of the two species.

"Critical habitat" means, briefly, that the loss of the area so designated would appreciably decrease the likelihood of the survival and recovery of an endangered or threatened species. Under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, Federal agencies are prohibited from authorizing, funding, or carrying out actions that would modify or destroy the critical habitat of a listed species. The designation affects only the actions of Federal agencies and does not automatically close an area to human use.

Several decades ago both the yellow-flowered wallflower and the large white-flowered evening-primrose grew over several hundred acres of the Antioch Dunes. Both species need open sand areas to survive. Mining of the dunes and the invasion of weedy exotic plants have reduced the wallflower to a range of just a few acres and the evening-primrose to about 60 acres.

The Antioch Dunes is a unique ecosystem whose plant, insect, and animal life has been frequently studied by scientists. In recent years significant portions of the dunes have been altered by industrialization, agriculture, and sand mining. In addition to the wallflower and the evening-primrose, the dunes also support populations of the endangered Lange's metalmark butterfly and several other rare insects and plants.